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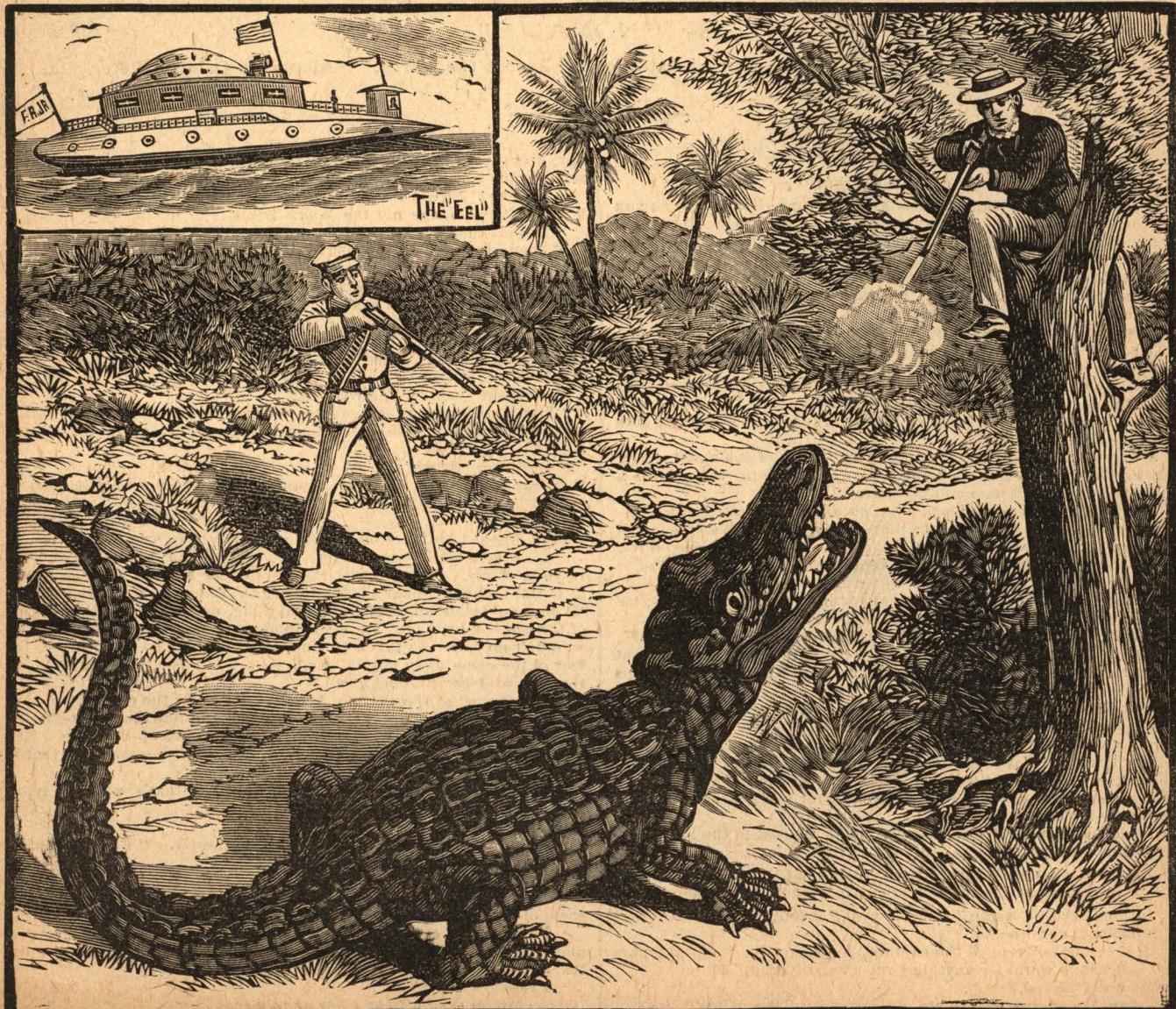
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The Weird Island: or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Strange Submarine Search for a Deep Sea Wonder.

By "NONAME."



The only chance Frank could see was the eye. He accordingly cried: "Try a shot at his eye, captain, and I will do the same." "Ay, ay, mate!" replied the skipper, loquaciously. "Here's for a try." With which he raised his rifle and fired. Evidently the shot was not a success, for the saurian did not stir.

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THE WEIRD ISLAND;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr.'s, Strange Submarine
Search for a Deep Sea Wonder.

A STORY OF THE SOUTH SEA.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Lost Caravan," "The Sunken Isthmus," "Across the Earth," "Along the Orinoco," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

"I AIN'T pertickerly superstitious myself, Frank, but as true as you live I believe that air island was haunted by spirits or sich like," said Captain Cook, as he adjusted his suspenders and shifted a quid of tobacco.

Frank Reade, Jr., indulged in a hearty laugh.

"Haunted!" he cried. "Well, I always thought you a man of rare courage and practical sense, Captain Cook. And yet you have come to me with an out and out ghost story."

"Humph!" exclaimed the old sailor, with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "If you would jest visit that Weird Island once you'd likely share some of my views. I kin tell you that I'm no chicken either, but there's somethin' mighty queer about it all."

"Where is this wonderful isle?" asked Frank, with something like interest.

Captain Cook slowly drew from an inner pocket of his reefer a long oiled package. This he untied and spread out upon the table, quite a good-sized chart with map and diagram.

He put his finger upon a black cross on a line of coast, and said:

"Thar's whar the Nettie went ashore in the night. We turned out and swam for our lives. As good luck had it six of us escaped alive. Here is the cliff where we found a cavern in which we managed to live all right enough for eight months. The fust seven months was all right enough, but the eighth month was a nightmare for all of us, an' I wouldn't go through it agin fer all thar gold thet's on that isle."

"What!" exclaimed Frank. "Then there was gold on the isle?"

"Gold! Wall, yew kin bet. In every ledge of rock it cropped out in jagged lines. The very sands glistened with it. Thar was heaps of it."

Frank Reade, Jr., was now interested in real earnest.

He looked the maps over again and again.

They were cleverly drawn.

Every headland, bay and break in the coast was faithfully given. The interior of the island was rough and hilly as depicted.

After some careful study, the young inventor exclaimed:

"Where is this isle, captain?"

The old sailor placed a finger upon some figures in the lower corner. Thus they read:

"Latitude 42 deg. 6 min. south; longitude 63 deg. 7 min. 10 sec. west, approximately. Make course nearly west from Santiago."

"In the South Pacific," said the young inventor; "the region of Cannibals and coral reefs."

"Jest so, mate," replied the captain, loquaciously; "and the purtiest seas in the world fer anything but a sailing craft."

"Why so?" asked Frank.

"Steam beats sails thar, mate, on account of the calms."

"Oh, I see. Well," said the young inventor, in a sort of soliloquy, "that is a part of the world very distant from this spot. It is, you

say, literally an island of gold, and yet it is either haunted or possessed of some weird characteristics."

"Exactly!" agreed the old salt, "and for that reason we could call it by no better name nor the Weird Island."

"In that case it was no doubt a fitting name. You are very sure that there was gold on the isle?"

"Yas."

"Do—do you think it has been visited since by other explorers?"
The captain shook his head.

"If it had ye'd have seen it charted, an' there'd been a legion of gold hunters out thar."

"That is logical," agreed Frank, and gave himself up to some moments of reflection.

Than once more he interrogated:

"But you have not explained yet why you considered the isle so extremely weird and so undesirable a place for a long period of residence?"

"Eh?" exclaimed the old skipper. "You want tew know what thar was thar which give us the idea thet it was a haunted place, eh?"

"Just so."

Cook hitched up his trousers and replied:

"There were many queer things, sir, which I can hardly make clear to ye in words. Sich as queer thunders under the isle, flashing lights at night, and the groans of dyin' men, an' whole troops of red devils, all fire an' brimstun, paradin' round a big, deep basin in their center of the isle. Why, I tell ye, my shipmates were so skeered that they wouldn't no more hav taken an ounce of that gold away with 'em, fer fear of the curse, than nothin' at all. I kin tell you, another week on that isle wud hav finished us all."

Frank looked at the captain keenly. He knew the capacity of seafaring men for inventing Munchausen tales, and had already begun to regard the captain as an excellent representative of his class. But yet the old fellow was so intensely serious that the young inventor was puzzled.

"Look here, Cook," he said, incredulously, "that's a pretty good yarn, but it is a little bit strong."

The old captain's right hand went up.

"By all the powers, mate," he cried, earnestly. "I swear that it is the solemn truth, every word of it!"

Frank was staggered.

"How did you get off the isle?" he asked. "I should have thought some of those red devils or imps would have annihilated you!"

"Put to sea in the ship's boat," declared Cook; "took our chances, and after driftin' a week we were picked up by a Chilian coaster a little off her course. It was a case of luck."

"I should say so!"

The captain took a fresh chew of tobacco.

"I make free to say," he said, "that I shouldn't have mentioned this matter if it hadn't been fer hearin' yew say thet yew didn't know

what new project to undertake with your new submarine boat. Now, if yew want a hard nut to crack, jest yew steer down thar in ther South Seas an' look up ther Weird Island. Mebbe you'll git some fun outen it."

Frank looked hard at the captain.

"I do not care to go on a fool's errand," he said; "do you mean every word you say? This is no pleasant yarn."

"My 'davy on it," said the captain, vigorously; "do ye think I'd lie to ye?"

"That settles it," cried the young inventor. "I am going to take your word for it and explore the mysteries of the Weird Island!"

"Hang me fer a harpooner," cried the old captain, "if I was ten years younger I'd go with ye!"

Frank Reade, Jr., the young inventor, is almost too well known to need an introduction.

At the moment he was sitting in his private office with the captain at the great machine works in Readestown. He had just completed his new submarine boat the "Eel," and with Barney and Pomp, his faithful fellow travelers, had been for days studying up some objective point or excuse for a cruise, when by the merest chance old Captain Cook had dropped in to make a friendly call.

That the captain's story was a strong one seemed certain to Frank. Yet Cook appeared sincere.

In any event Frank had decided to undertake the cruise.

"In any case," he thought, "it will be a trip to the South Sea and I might as well undertake that as anything."

The captain turned over the charts and map to Frank, and a little while later as he was taking his leave, he ejaculated:

"Dash me, Frank, but if I wasn't sech an old useless hulk I'd go along with ye!"

"In spite of the little red demons and the ghastly peculiarities of the Weird Island," laughed Frank.

"Ay, that I would," said the captain, stoutly, "for to tell the truth I've more than half suspected since then that ther gold had suthin' to dew with them sperrits. That's my pinyun. Do ye understand?"

A light broke across Frank's mind. He drew a deep breath.

"I think I do," he said slowly. "And in that case we might as well go prepared for things corporeal as well as spiritual."

After the captain took his leave, Frank arose and paced the floor for some time. He was thus engaged when there came a light tap at the door, and the next moment a shock of red hair and a comical Irish mug appeared in the crevice.

"Shure, Mistrer Frank, axin' yure pardon fer the intrusion, sor, but phwat will yez do wid all av thim packages that cum to-day, sor?"

"They are stores for the Eel, Barney," replied Frank. "See that they are stored away in the hold of the vessel, and—wait a moment."

"All right, sor."

"Where is Pomp?"

"The naygur is roight here, sor."

In the doorway there appeared a black face and woolly head. They were embellished with rolling eyes and white shining ivories.

"I'se right yere, Marse Frank. Wha' am yo' ordahs, sah?"

"Come in here, both of you!"

The order was obeyed.

"Now," said Frank, with something like sternness. "I want to tell you that I have made up my mind where to go with the submarine boat."

"Yis, sor!"

"A'righ't, sah!"

"We are going to the South Seas."

Barney turned a hand-spring and Pomp cut a pigeon-wing.

"A'righ't, Marse Frank. I'se done glad to hear dat, sah!"

"Begorra, it's shwelled up wid delight I am, sor!"

"All right," said Frank, curtly. "Now you know what must be done. The Eel must be in the best possible shape for a cruise within a week. See that nothing is left undone!"

"All roight, sor!"

"Yo' kin bet we will."

"All right. Now you may go!"

The two comical fellows ducked and bowed and scraped, and then vanished through the doorway to carry out the orders given them.

CHAPTER II.

DESCRIBES THE EEL.

"Be me sowl, naygur," cried Barney, as they scrambled out into the big yard, "it's glad I am to be after leavin' Readestown fer a whole!"

"I should fink yo' would fo' de sake ob yo' creditors," said Pomp, with a tinge of mischievousness.

In an instant the Celt's dander was up.

"Bejabers av yures don't sind the sheriff after yez, ye may count yeself lucky," he retorted.

"I allus pays mah bones' debts, sah," replied Pomp. "I don't owe no man a dollar dat I kain't pay."

"Shure that's bekase nobody in Readestown wud thrust yez fer a cint," sniffed Barney.

"If dat am so, it am bekase I'se seen in yo' company so often," averred Pomp, frackly.

"Be me sowl it's betther than yures anyway."

"Hub! dat ain't sayin' much fo' I don't purtend to be anyfing moh dan a culled gemmen anyway, while yo' puts on moh airs dan a turkey cock!"

Barney turned around and began to roll up his sleeves.

"Shure, that's an insult!" he sputtered. "The O'Sheas always prided thimselves on wipin' out sich a thing as that, an' I'm to defind me honor!"

"Den yo' cumbs pretty near to defendin' nuflin'," said Pomp easily. "Wha' am yo' gwine to do, Iish?"

"Bejabers, I'm goin' to make yez apologize, naygur, fer yer insult!" declared the Celt with affected bravado.

The coon's eyes glistened.

"Keep off, sah!" he said warningly. "I don't allow nobody to tri-fle wif me, sah!"

"Bejabers, I'll be the exception thin!" cried Barney, squaring away.

"Lub out fer yesill!"

With which he made a biff at Pomp. This was too much for the darky.

Pomp dodged, and, lowering his head like a ram, he charged at the Celt. Had he struck him with the force of that charge Barney would have felt it.

But the Celt moved to one side just in the nick of time. Pomp went bang against a stone post back of the Irishman.

Such a terrible crack on the head would have killed an ordinary man, but the negro's skull is proverbially hard. Pomp reeled for a moment, but quickly recovered, and shaking his head like a mad bull, turned for another attack.

Barney burst into a paroxysm of laughter.

In fact, so deeply plunged was he in the fit that he was for a moment unguarded.

Fatal moment!

Pomp came at him again like a whirlwind. Barney tried to clinch, but in vain.

The darky's head struck him full in the abdomen, and he went down like a thousand of bricks.

For a moment the Celt rolled gasping and overcome on the ground. Pomp had turned a complete somersault over him.

"Howly murtherer!" wailed the Celt; "it's kilt I am, bad cess to yez fer a murtherin' omadhouin!"

"Huh! I reckon yo' got nuff, sah?"

"Divil a bit," retorted Barney, scrambling up.

And they went at it again tooth and nail. Not until each was wholly exhausted did they desist.

Then they hastened away to do Frank's bidding.

While they were the best of friends, each was fond of nagging and teasing the other. It generally resulted in a scuffle or a wrestle of a good-natured sort.

The lower end of the big yard terminated in a wall of brick. In this there was a broad gate.

Beyond was another even larger yard, and in the center of this was a tank or basin of water.

This was broad and deep, and connected with a narrow canal and lock, which led down into the river below.

In the center of this basin there floated the submarine boat. It did not present a very imposing appearance, for two-thirds of its hull was submerged.

But such of it as appeared above the surface, showed a long cigar-shaped hull, with a square cabin rising above the railed steel deck. Above the cabin was a dome with dead-eye windows.

The Eel was constructed throughout of toughest steel. It was nicely balanced and of symmetrical proportions as was necessary for a deep sea boat.

There was a pilot house forward just over the long steel ram and a powerful search-light rested upon the upper deck.

But it was the interior of the submarine boat which must claim attention and admiration.

Frank had spared no pains to make it luxurious and convenient. There were a number of compartments and cabins each with its specific purpose.

The main cabin was above the deck and was finely equipped. Off from it were the staterooms and berths and beyond them was a charming little dining-saloon with a galley connected. This was Pomp's domicile.

The pilot house was equipped with all the necessary nautical instruments and charts. It also contained the electric key board by which the engines were operated and the steering apparatus. There were great windows of solid plate glass through which the pilot could look in all directions.

Then there were the electric engines and dynamos in the hold which furnished the motive power of the craft. These were a marvel of the inventor's skill, and were operated by a storage system which was his secret.

Then there was the oxygen generator, a huge tank of chemicals, by means of which the boat was furnished with cool and pure air. This was conducted in pipes to all parts of the boat, and connected with it was a device for destroying the foul air as fast as it was manufactured.

With this apparatus, the submarine boat could remain indefinitely under water without danger of suffocation by any of the crew.

But the device for sinking and raising the boat was the most ingenious.

This consisted of a huge air-chamber next the keel. By means of pneumatic pressure it could be cleared of water in a few seconds, which would send the boat to the surface like a cork. To sink the boat it was only necessary to open a valve and instantly flood the air-chamber.

Such was the Eel, the new submarine boat, and Frank Reade, Jr.'s

most wonderful invention. She was without a parallel anywhere on the earth.

The more Frank Reade, Jr., pondered over Captain Cook's narrative of the Weird Island, the more fascinated he became with the project.

He lost no time in getting everything in readiness. The submarine boat was thoroughly equipped.

People knew that the Eel was about to set out upon a great voyage to some far part of the earth. But to just what part they did not know.

The secret rested between the four, Frank Reade, Jr., Barney, and Pomp and Captain Cook.

Thus matters were, and the day arranged for departure was close at hand, when suddenly Captain Cook, dressed up spick and span in a new sailor's suit, appeared at the office door.

Barney showed him in promptly, and Frank gripped his hand warmly.

"I am glad to see you, captain," he declared, heartily. "I have been looking for you for some time."

The old salt hitched up his duck trousers and replied:

"Hang me high, mate, I couldn't keep away. I've taken a new lease of youth."

Frank smiled.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm goin' tew try one more v'yage and then go into ordinary. I'm up here to sign ship's papers."

"What—" began Frank.

"Yas, I'm goin' tew sign with you skipper fer that deep sea cruise. Can't help it! The sperrit moves me. Then agin I've a heap of curiosity tew see what you'll dew out there on that island!"

Frank said nothing for a moment. This was not altogether a surprise.

But he was wondering what the old skipper could be thinking of to undertake at his age of life such an arduous feat. It was chances against his ever coming home alive.

Altogether Frank was deeply averse to assuming the responsibility. But he saw the captain was in earnest. And there was no refusing him.

So he swiftly decided to make the best of the situation, and said:

"Good for you, Cook! We shall be glad of your company, but—"

"Eh?" ejaculated the captain. "What's yer reckoning, lad?"

"Have you fully considered the matter?"

"Every darned bit!"

"But—the ghosts and—"

"Ain't a bit afraid of 'em so long's I'm with yew on this boat. I kin dead safe."

"It's a long voyage with many chances."

The old salt shrugged his shoulders and then arose.

"I've been takin' chances all my life, mate. Howsumdever, if ye don't want my company, I ain't sayin' no more."

"Oh, I assure you, we should be delighted," declared Frank. "I was only considering your welfare and comfort."

"Don't ye do it. I'm all right as a huckleberry, an' ready fer duty. My togs are on hand, an' it's fer yew to say when I shall go aboard."

Frank reflected a moment. After all, he thought, the captain's services were not to be despised, and, as he had visited that part of the globe, this knowledge must be of assistance.

So he said warmly:

"Go aboard at once if you desire. We shall start to-morrow, if nothing happens."

"All right, skipper; yours to serve," replied the captain, with a quarter deck salute. "Here's a happy v'yage!"

A plank led across to the submarine boat's deck. The captain crossed it and went aboard.

He was assigned a stateroom, and at once proceeded to make himself familiar with the boat.

Frank had declared that the Eel should sail the next day, and Barney and Pomp had all in readiness.

The voyagers went aboard at an early hour. The Eel dropped out into the canal, and thence into the river.

A great throng waited upon the banks to see her start. She sailed down the river amid their cheers. Very soon Readestown faded from view in the dim distance.

They were off!

CHAPTER III.

OFF CAPE HORN.

With the reader's kind permission we will now change the scene of our story to the stormy seas of Cape Horn.

Here among the storm-tossed craft, which were trying to weather that rough promontory, was the small but seaworthy Eel.

Of course, it would have been easy enough for Frank to have sent the Eel to the bottom and thus have avoided the rough winds and waves. But all were in favor of continuing on the surface for various reasons of sentiment.

Thus far the voyage had been a glorious success.

Captain Cook had proved himself a hero and a helper. He was almost always in the pilot-house, and his familiarity with these seas was of great advantage.

Nearly all the way the Eel had traveled on the surface, as greater speed could be made than under the water. No incident of a serious sort had transpired.

They would soon, with good fortune, be in the South Pacific, and all were looking forward to this with anticipation and interest.

Pitching in the rough Horn waters, the Eel slowly crept along to the westward. The day was a dark and dreary one, the sky being overcast and a chill wind blowing out of the icy south.

Captain Cook was at the wheel. Pomp was cooking and Barney was on deck, while Frank was in his cabin, when the Celt chanced to sight a distant sail.

With that habit instinctive to the ocean traveler, he raised his glass and fell to studying it. It was visible only at intervals as they rose from the trough of the sea.

But as he gazed, Barney suddenly became conscious of a surprising fact. A small flag hung at the mast head.

"Be me sowl," he muttered, "that luks moightily loike a signal av distress. I wondher if it can be?"

The Celt hesitated a moment, then went to the pilot-house door.

"Shure, Captain Cook," he cried, "wud yez be after coming out here an' takin' a luk at yondher ship? Shure, I think she's in thrubble, sor!"

"Ay—aye, lad!"

Cook lashed the steering gear and came out on deck. The glass was tendered him by Barney.

For some moments he scrutinized the distant craft. At this moment Frank came on deck.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"It looks tew me as if she was flyin' a signal for help," replied the captain in his nasal voice. "What do ye say to bearin' down on her, skipper?"

"Very good," agreed Frank. "We would be less than human to refuse her aid."

Cook entered the pilot house and changed the course of the Eel. She bore away swiftly to the southward.

The distant ship also changed its course, apparently to approach its deliverer. The two vessels drew nearer.

It could be seen then that the ship was laboring heavily and made scant headway, though she had every sail bent. There was no mistaking the cause of her trouble.

She was leaking.

Whether she would keep up until the Eel could reach her was a question. There was another serious question.

The Eel was a small boat. There might be a score or more in the crew of the ship. Could they all find safe quarters aboard the Eel?

Even if they did, what course could be then pursued? Either the Eel must look about for the possible chance of embarking the rescued crew upon some other vessel or take them to some seaport the nearest of which would be the Chilian coast.

This would mean delay and some sacrifice of stores. But Frank only weighed this matter a moment.

It was enough to know that human life was in danger and duty demanded that they go to the rescue without question.

So the Eel bore down with all speed. Our adventurers were much excited as well as interested.

But now that the ship's crew saw a chance for rescue they must have relaxed their efforts at the pumps. This proved a fatal move.

The ship was seen to suddenly settle in the water and stagger. Her crew were like flies in the rigging.

"Heaven help them!" cried Frank, wildly. "She is going down!"

"Crowd on speed!" shouted the captain.

"Begorra, it's too late!" cried Barney. "Och hone, it's all up wid them!"

Boats were seen putting out from the ship's side. Two of these were swamped; one got clear.

On shot the Eel.

But there was not time. The end came quickly.

With a lurch the ship settled stern first. A great wave ran up over her quarter; then her bows went up into the air.

With a groan our adventurers saw all this. They were powerless to avert the awful catastrophe.

The next moment a great column of water shot up into the air. The ship laid over, and went down like a rocket, apparently with all on board.

Horror unspeakable oppressed the submarine voyagers. With cold sweat upon his brow, Frank averted his face.

A few moments later the submarine boat ran over the spot where the ship had last been seen. There were heaps of floating debris and rigging, but no sign of human life was seen at once.

"All are lost, I reckon!" cried Cook, "that is hard luck, mates."

"Indeed it is!" agreed Frank.

But Barney gave a cry.

"Bejabers there's a boat an' a man on it, sor!"

Sure enough, distant a few hundred yards was an overturned boat and across it lay the figure of a man. Whether he was alive or not could only be guessed.

But it was determined to pick him up. So the submarine boat bore down in that direction.

It was not long before it was alongside the boat. The man had just strength enough to make a sign with his hand.

Then Barney leaned over the thwarts and passing a rope under his shoulders quickly drew him aboard.

He was seen to be a type of foreigner, undoubtedly a Spaniard. He was dressed like a Chilian.

His features were shrewd and indicated a man of great force and possibly a sharp temper, characteristic of his race.

He fainted immediately upon being drawn aboard, and as Frank was trying to revive him with brandy, he noticed that his hair was matted with gore.

At once he saw that the fellow was undoubtedly badly wounded.

"Take him into the cabin," he said, "he must have treatment."

Barney and Pomp carried the unfortunate man into the cabin. Then Frank and the captain examined the wound.

"He is doomed!" said the young inventor, solemnly, "that is a fatal wound. He will hardly come out of his swoon. The skull is fractured and the brain ruptured."

For a time a sense of regret and horror was upon all.

Frank's prediction came true. This one survivor of the doomed ship did not long survive.

He lived but a few hours. Late that evening he drew his last breath, never having once become conscious to explain the fate of his ship.

Then an examination of his person was made. This resulted in a number of startling discoveries.

In an inner pocket there were papers proving him the first mate of the Santiago, coasting vessel of the Chilean merchant marine. His name was plainly written:

"Raoul Carrero, Mate of the Santiago."

"She was a Chilean vessel," concluded Frank.

"Yes, yew kin see the chap is a Gringo!" declared Cook, "but—hey therel what's that?"

Upon the back of a packet of Spanish letters were a number of figures and a nautical reckoning. The prominent one read:

"Isle Bonita, Latitude, 42 degrees, 9 minutes, south longitude, 6 degrees, 7 minutes west."

For a moment Frank and the captain gazed at each other dumfounded. Each read conflicting deductions in the other's face.

The inscription was in Spanish, but easily interpreted. For a moment neither could speak.

Then Frank said:

"That is our island!"

"Right," agreed Cook, "tha's only one thing to make out from this. It's sartin this 'ere Gringo knew the latitude of the Weird Island."

Frank inclined his head.

"In that event—"

"The gold—"

There was no need to say more. Each understood the other. What more plausible than that this Chilean vessel had either been to the isle for gold or was going thither?

But how untimely her fate! If her cargo really consisted of the precious metal, it was long since buried in the sea and beyond the reach of ordinary mortals.

But Captain Cook took a turn up and down the deck. Then he said:

"I don't believe but that they was on their way tew the isle, Frank. If not, what war they doing away off down here in this part of the world?"

"They were on the wrong tack to reach latitude 42 degrees," said Frank.

"Jest so. But they mought hev bin blowed down hyar by a storm or suttin' or ernuther."

Frank was bound to admit the possibility of this. At any rate, he knew the proper way to settle the question.

The body of the dead Chilean was hastily prepared for burial. Barney and Pomp rolled it up in a blanket and carried it to the rail.

A heavy weight inside the wrapping carried it to the bottom. Then Frank went into the pilot-house.

"All in!" he shouted; "I'm going to the bottom!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Cook. "Sure enough! We can then find out what has become of the Gringo's ship!"

"That is my plan," said Frank, succinctly. "To me it seems the best plan. We will know whether there is any gold aboard or not."

A moment later the Eel was below the surface. She did not touch the bottom, but went down within sight of it.

The bed of the ocean here was very sandy and unlike the floor of the South Atlantic or Pacific, being nearly destitute of marine plants.

The Eel made her way along slowly, and the search-light's rays were employed in locating the sunken ship. They were soon successful.

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER THE SEA.

AFTER traveling a wide radius, suddenly the rays of the light were focused upon the sunken hull of a vessel.

That it was the storm-riddled Santiago there could be no doubt.

The submarine boat drew near enough to get a good view of the wreck. It lay half upon its side in a great bar of sand.

None of the bodies of the crew were to be seen. It was more than likely that they had been carried away by sharks or some powerful undertow.

Frank settled the Eel down upon a bed of sand, not far from the wreck. Then he focused the search-light upon the wreck, and said:

"Now we are ready for work."

"Eh?" exclaimed Cook. "What can we do at this distance, mate?"

"What do you mean?"

"Hadn't we oughter git near, whar we kin lower a rope into her or do something to git a look at her cabin?"

"It is not safe to go nearer with the submarine boat," declared Frank.

"No?" ejaculated the captain. "What good kin we do here then?"

"I will show you."

Frank went into the hold, and presently came up with a long and deep box in his arms.

He quickly opened the lid of this and took a diver's helmet from it. Several others were in the box.

Connected with the helmet was what looked like a huge knapsack. This Frank put on his back and secured it with straps.

Then he donned some heavy shoes.

"Great whales!" exclaimed Cook; "yew ain't goin' tew try an' go over thar with a divin' suit on?"

"Of course I am," replied Frank, "and you are going to do the same."

The captain shook his head.

"Not for Joe," he said.

"Very well," said Frank. "You may go with me then, Barney."

"All roight, sor," cried the Celt, with alacrity. "It's deloighted I am, sor."

And he hastily strapped on another of the helmets. The captain was astounded.

"Where's your life-lines?" he roared. "How will ye handle them?"

"We don't require any," replied Frank.

"Eh?"

"That is true."

"How do ye get yer air, then?"

"From this little generator and reservoir which we carry on our backs. These are a diving-suit of my own invention, captain, and with them you can remain an indefinite length of time under water unhampered with a life-line."

"By jingo!" exclaimed the old sailor. "Yew beat the band on inventions. I'll take my davy. That's a great wrinkle, now ain't it?"

"I think it a good invention," agreed Frank. "Come on, Barney! we will explore every part of that wreck, and will hope to learn her errand in these seas."

"Good! I wish ye success!" cried the captain, eagerly.

"And you and Pomp must keep good guard here until we return."

"Golly! yo' kin jes' be suah ob dat, sah," cried the coon.

Off the main cabin was a vestibule. Into this the two divers stepped, and Frank closed the cabin door behind them.

Then he turned a faucet or valve, and in a few moments the vestibule was flooded with water. Next he opened a door leading out upon the deck.

The two divers emerged and stood in the open sea.

It required some moments for them to get used to the terrible pressure. Then they started to leave the Eel.

Down the side they slid and stood upon the sands.

It was like walking in air to cross to the wreck, but they kept on slowly, and finally covered the distance.

From the window of the pilot-house Pomp and the captain were watching them. The light was powerful.

Reaching the wreck the divers paused for a moment to consider the best way of boarding it. An open port near by presented the best solution.

In through this Frank crawled, and then assisted Barney after him. They stood in the main cabin of the vessel.

The search-light illuminated the interior perfectly. It was a disordered scene, as might have been expected.

Everything was turned upside down, but no dead men were seen. That they had all been on deck was quite certain.

Frank placed his helmet close to Barney's, and shouted:

"Keep close to me, Barney, I may need your assistance."

"All right, sor."

Frank crossed the cabin to a desk and cabinet. This had undoubtedly been the captain's.

There were papers spread upon the table, and some documents were in the pigeon holes. But the action of the water had destroyed the intelligible writing, which was all in Spanish.

Frank looked in vain for the ship's log. It could not be found.

There was but one other thing to do. This was to search the ship for any trace of the gold cargo which she might carry.

So together the two divers explored every part of the wreck from the stem to the stern and down to the keel.

She carried no cargo whatever. This was a curious fact. Nothing more remained to be done but to return to the submarine boat.

The only clew was the marking of the exact longitude and latitude of the Weird Island upon Raoul Carrero's papers. Indeed, this was rather more of a mystery than a clew.

Several logical conclusions could be deduced!

It was possible first that the Chilean vessel was on her way to the Weird Island and had in some way got off her course. Or secondly, she had visited the isle, and had already disposed of a cargo and was on her way to some other part of the world.

Thirdly, it was possible that the figures of nautical reckoning were Carrero's alone and known to no other member of the crew. There was no positive evidence that the Santiago was bound for the isle or that it had ever paid a visit to it.

All these things flashed through Frank's mind. In any event he saw no logical explanation.

It seemed certain that Carrero knew of the latitude of the isle whether he had ever visited it or knew its true character or not.

In this puzzled frame of mind Frank started to return to the Eel. But the diving expedition was not to be devoid of incident.

As he emerged from the port hole with Barney a queer thing happened. The hull of the ship began to reel and suddenly pitched further over upon its side.

This lowered the port and an avalanche of sand swept down upon the two divers.

Barney slid down in it to his neck and Frank was wedged against the ship's hull up to his arm-pits.

There they were, struggling to extricate themselves. Barney was unable to do this, but Frank might have succeeded, but at that moment a new and terrible peril presented itself.

Around the ship's hull there glided a sea monster the like of which they had never seen.

Its proportions were gigantic and hideous in the extreme, being a cross between a crab and an octopus.

Straight for the two divers the creature came. Barney made a frantic effort to extricate himself.

Frank did the same and succeeded in freeing his arm and grasping his ax, which he wore at his belt. The creature directed its first attack at him.

This was fortunate for Barney.

Frank braced himself for a terrible struggle. He swung his ax aloft and waited for a good chance at the monster. It came.

When it was within a few yards he let the ax fall. It cleaved its way half through one of the creature's arms. The water boiled and hissed violently.

For an instant the monster recoiled. Then it returned to the attack.

A half dozen times Frank beat it back. But he could not seem to inflict a mortal hurt.

Moreover his strength was fast going. It seemed as if there could be but one outcome to the fight when rescue came.

Suddenly a dark object shot forward. It struck the monster full and fair and swept it from its hold. The next moment it was crushed against the side of the wreck.

Then the two divers saw a huge black body over them. It was easy to recognize it as the hull of the Eel.

Pomp and the captain had seen the awful peril of their companions from the pilot house.

"Massy Lordy!" cried Pomp. "Marse Frank an' de Iishman am done gwine to git killed!"

"Great Jeremiah!" cried Captain Cook, aghast. "That will never do, mate! We must go tew help 'em!"

"Golly! How's we gwine to do dat? I see! Yo' stay yere, an' I puts on mah divin' suit an' goes out dar!"

Pomp flew to carry this plan into execution. He had donned the helmet and actually emerged upon the deck, when the captain worked his grand coup.

He sprang into the pilot house and instantly swung the lever back. The boat rose a few feet from the sands.

Then the captain drove it forward, aiming at the sea monster with the boat's ram. The game worked well.

The ram swept the creature aside like a fly and crushed it. The lives of Frank and Barney were saved.

Pomp sprung down with a spade, and instantly began to dig them out. In a few moments he had liberated them.

Then they scrambled onto the Eel's deck. It is needless to say that they were exuberantly joyous.

Once in the cabin, Barney and Pomp danced a break-down. After some moments of this, however, Cook asked Frank:

"How did ye make it?"

"There's no cargo aboard that ship," replied Frank.

The captain looked stunned.

"No cargo?"

"No!"

"What do ye mean? Not of any kind?"

"Exactly!"

The captain whistled slowly.

"That's queer; did ye find her log?"

"No, that was missing; neither were there any papers that would have given us a clew."

Cook was thoughtful a moment.

"It's mighty queer," he finally soliloquized. "I don't understand it, unless she was on her way to ther isle."

CHAPTER V.

LAND, HO!

"I DON'T believe that," said Frank, with confidence, "she was too far off the course."

"That's so; but what do ye think? Hain't ye no idea at all?"

"Yes," replied the young inventor. "I think that the Santiago's master and crew were never in the secret of the Weird Isle at all. I believe that Raoul Carrero kept that to himself."

The captain's face clouded.

"Well, but how did he get that nautical reckoning?"

The two men looked keenly at each other. Here was the real problem.

An answer was not at hand. Finally Frank said:

"We shall have to let that go for what it is worth. Perhaps when we reach the Weird Isle we may find an explanation."

"Yes," agreed the old salt. "But it settles one thing."

"What?"

"We are not the only people that know of the existence of this ere island of gold."

"Very true!"

"So—we had better git thar as soon as possible."

"That we will!"

Frank stepped into the pilot-house and opened the lever. The submarine boat began to rise.

Up she went to the surface. It was a starlit night,

However, it was easy to set the boat's course and away she sped to the westward. As all were weary Barney was left at the wheel, and the others turned in.

They slept long and soundly. Pomp relieved Barney just before daybreak.

For days the submarine boat held its westward course along the fortieth parallel. One day Captain Cook made a reckoning.

"The isle oughter be in sight within forty-eight hours," he said.

"She's jest a trifle ter north'ard of us!"

The boat's course was changed. Not an hour had elapsed when Barney, who was at the wheel, cried:

"Land ho!"

"Ay, ay!" cried Captain Cook, rushing on deck. "Whereaway, me hearty?"

But he needed no glass to see it. There on the western horizon was the low-lying black line.

It was a coast, and that of an isle as could be plainly seen. Every moment it grew plainer.

"Is it our isle?" asked Frank.

"Wall," said the captain, "if it is, then I'm dead off my reckonin'. It's much as four degrees south of whar it was when I visited it last."

This was surprising indeed.

But the captain rejoined:

"Howsundever, our reckoning afore might not have been jest correct. We'll call it that way, anyway."

Steadily the ship bore down upon the tropical isle. In a few hours the submarine voyagers lay off the shore.

The captain declared that it did not look at all familiar. He scanned it with some disappointment.

"I reckon it's another isle," he said, "but I kin tell fer sure arter we land."

"That we will proceed to do at once," said Frank.

The Eel crept cautiously along among the reefs until a deep little harbor was found. Into this it made its way.

As near the shore as possible the anchor was dropped. Then Frank got out a small, portable boat.

"Come, captain," he said; "let us go ashore on a little exploring tour."

"I'm with you, mate. But here's a pointer."

"What?"

"Ye'd better go armed."

"Of course. We will each take a Winchester. Little red demons and spooks can be fought with nothing better, and Frank laughed.

The captain smiled grimly.

"Ye may laugh onten the other corner of your mouth yit," he said, metaphorically.

"Be me sowl, Misther Frank," said Barney, "av yez no use fer me?"

"You are to stay here with Pomp and defend the Eel," replied Frank.

Disappointment was plainly depicted in the Celt's face, but he said nothing. A few moments later Frank and the captain put out for the shore.

Pulling the boat high up on the sands, the captain said:

"Let us climb that high cliff, mate. I reckon we kin see the rest of the isle from there, an' I kin tell whether it's the right place or not."

"All right," agreed Frank.

So they began to climb the cliff. It was a rough path and cost them some exertion.

But finally the summit was reached and they stood for a moment looking far out to sea. Not a sail dotted the vast expanse anywhere.

Then they turned in the other direction and looked over the island.

It was a remarkable scene spread to their view.

Far in the distance were mountain peaks. One of these faintly smoking suggested a volcano.

This settled one fact in Frank's mind in regard to the geology of the isle. Color was lent to the assumption that gold existed there.

For coral isles are always devoid of minerals. The creation of the coral insect rising from the sea in gradual process, little is found in their composition save sand and shells or possibly guano.

But the Weird Island was undoubtedly of volcanic origin. Minerals were therefore likely to be found.

Between their position and the distant peaks there lay vast forests of palms and mangroves, jungles of cane and brake. To the south, contiguous to the shore, was a long level plain of green turf. Northward was a rocky, rugged district.

The captain gazed long and studiously at the scene.

Finally Frank said:

"Well, captain, what do you think of it?"

"It is the same isle," he said.

"Yes?"

"Only—"

"What?"

"That volcano was not in operation the last time I was here. That's a bit queer to me."

"I can't see how it can be," said Frank. "Volcanoes are intermittent in their spells of activity."

"Yes," agreed the captain, absently, "I reckon that's so. Do ye see that low ridge jest nigh the foot of them peaks?"

"Yes!"

"Wall, that's whar ther big basin is, whar ther leetle red demons are to be found."

Frank smiled at this.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, "I have a keen desire to see them. How far is it over there?"

The captain looked at the sun.

"We kin make it in an hour!" he declared. "Thar's a way through thet jungle or thar used to be over yender where that leetle creek breaks out. A ridge of land along thar is tolerably clear of trees."

"Let us find that clear way then," said Frank.

They took a last glance at the Eel.

The submarine boat was apparently secure and Frank felt that it would be safe in Barney and Pomp's watchful care.

Therefore he felt no hesitancy in undertaking the long journey to the distant mountain range.

He apprehended no danger save possibly from wild beasts for he attached no credence to the captain's yarn regarding the red demons and ghosts.

As for wild animals, there might possibly be such. Tigers and leopards were sometimes found upon these tropical isles. But they always shunned man.

So with all confidence he set forth to visit the great basin described by the captain.

If Coot had any fears he did not yield to them but trudged manfully along beside Frank. To be sure his face was a trifle white and he occasionally looked nervously about him.

But the two explorers found the open ridge of land easily enough, and were soon striking rapidly inland.

It was easy to follow the course of the creek, which, however, had more the appearance of a channel, being wide and deep and seemingly without a current.

It lay between sheer walls of stone. It was impossible for the two men to cross it at this point so they were obliged to follow its banks.

"I never was on this side of thet crick afore," declared the captain; "it's a queer lookin' stream. Water's pretty dead, ain't it?"

"You are right," agreed Frank; "it don't cut the island in two, does it?"

"Nary a bit! I've been on the other shore an' there's no break. We'll soon cum tew shallow water or to the fountain head."

They pushed on, and soon were threading their way laboriously through the cane thicket.

If they had only been able to cross now, on the other side was open land and easy traveling.

But they could only make the best of it and climb on. After a long time they came out of the cane and then to a remarkable discovery.

The coast was now fully two miles distant.

The creek had begun to widen instead of narrow, and now enlarged into a half circular basin of water covering several acres.

The lower end of this basin extended into a deep and dark mouthed cavern, in the face of a high and precipitous cliff.

How deep this cavern was our explorers were unable to guess. But that it might extend, perhaps, under the entire island was possible.

For a moment they gazed upon the scene in amazement.

"That's powerful queer!" exclaimed the captain. "Whar dew yew s'pose thet cavern leads to?"

"Give it up," said Frank. "Perhaps to an inland sea or basin under the island."

"Wall, I'd like to sail on it."

"Perhaps we will. I think the Eel can easily come up into this channel. We will try it."

They walked around the elevation in which was the mouth of the cavern. This brought them out upon the other side of the creek or channel.

They, however, spent but little more time in this place.

Both were anxious to reach the volcano and the basin, described by the captain as having been inhabited by fantastic demons and white-robed spirits.

CHAPTER VI.

ADVENTURES ON THE ISLAND.

LEAVING the creek they now crossed a high divide, and descended to a wide but smooth plain.

This was in places sandy, and the captain took up a handful and passing it through his fingers, said:

"Do ye see them shiny particles? Wall, that's gold!"

"So it is," agreed Frank.

"Yes—and every part of this isle is made up of it. It can be washed out of the soil anywhere, or traced in the rocks. It's a rich lay."

"I should say so!" agreed Frank. "If this isle was only near the American coast what an exodus hither there would be!"

"Ye're right! but look! that's the ridge dividin' this plain from the harnted basin!"

"The haunted basin!" laughed Frank, "by all means, let us get there at once, I'm anxious to see it."

"Foller me, then!"

The captain ascended the slope in a manner quite wonderful for a man of his years.

He reached the summit and halted. Nor did he go further. He stood there like a petrified statue.

Frank reached his side the next moment. Then he gave a start.

The captain had described and he had been prepared to see a vast and deep rocky basin lying at the base of the volcanic mountain.

They beheld instead—what? Not an empty basin certainly, but a lake of water of respectable proportions.

For full a minute neither spoke. Then the captain turned slowly as if upon a pivot and faced Frank.

"Hang me fer a Tartar!" he growled, "this ain't accordin' tew rule.

Do yew think I lied to ye?"

"Lied to me?" echoed Frank.

"Yes, in course. Why don't yew say suthin'? Why don't yew git mad an' disgusted?"

"Why should I?" asked Frank in sheer surprise.

"Why—I told you there was a rocky basin here and that it was haunted by demons. Now we hev found it only a big lake!"

"That is all right," said Frank; "some evolution of nature has transformed the basin into a lake."

"Filled it up with water, eh?"

"Yes."

The captain frowned.

"An' yew say that natur' did that?"

"I should say so."

"Wall, I don't believe a durned word of it. Some cantankerous gang of land sharks hev done this. They've rigged up some sort of a scheme tew let the sea water in hyar an' fill it up."

"What could be their purpose?" asked Frank, somewhat puzzled.

"Why, it's easy enough tew see. They wanted probably to drown out the demons and spooks."

In spite of himself Frank laughed.

"Well," he cried, "perhaps Raoul Carrero did it."

"Mebbe so, durn him!"

"Tut, tut! Why do you care? I should think it would be a relief to know that the spooks are all out of the way now."

"Confound it, mate, I agreed to show 'em to ye."

"Oh, well, don't feel bad about that," laughed Frank, "it's all right, captain. I don't feel a bit disappointed. Let us drop this matter and try to find out how this place was closed."

"I'll go ye," agreed the captain.

So they moved along the shore of the lake to find an outlet. There seemed to be none.

There were a number of inlets in the shape of little mountain streams. But there seemed to be no way of letting the water out of the lake.

"I have an idea," said Frank, "some mountain flood has descended, and swelling these little streams, which have plunged into the basin and filling it made the lake."

"No," cried the captain, "thar was an outlet, you kin bet. A stream did run through ther center of it. Why ain't it filled up afore?"

"Maybe the outlet has become choked up?" suggested Frank.

"Mebbe some land sharks choked it up," said the captain sharply. "Thar must have been a good reason for it. P'raps thar was too much gold in the place."

The same thought occurred to Frank. It was by no means improbable. The basin might have been filled for a good reason, and no better one could be found than that gold had been found there in large quantities.

Whoever had flooded the basin doubtless knew how to draw the water off again. Doubtless the discoverer of the rich gold claim in the basin had done this to hide the wealth, and had then flown to civilization to procure aid to mine it.

It was not at all unlikely that Raoul Carrero might be the man. Though, if so, he was dead and his secret had doubtless gone with him.

Frank imparted this plausible theory to the captain.

The latter agreed with him, but said:

"Thar's no reason then why we shouldn't claim all the gold down thar. Jest let me find out how to empty that basin."

"I have a theory," said Frank.

"Eh? What is it?"

"Do you remember the stone-bound channel we followed to the mouth of the cave?"

The captain nodded.

"Yes."

"Well, I have an idea that is the outlet of this basin. If so——"

"By hookey, mebbe it is; but how can we tell fer sure?"

"There's one way."

"What?"

"The submarine boat."

The captain's eyes glistened.

"Sure enough," he cried; "we can sail right up into this lake mebbe!"

"But to do so we must empty it."

"Ain't that what we want?"

"Yes and no. If the submarine boat gets into this basin by opening the outlet, she is stranded."

The captain nodded.

"Sure as four bells," he agreed, "but there's no other way I kin see to empty thy basin."

"Well," said Frank, slowly, "I am going to sail up the channel in her anyway."

"Good fer you!"

"First, however, let us make a trip around this lake to see if we can find simple means of opening the outlet."

"Exactly! I'm your oyster. Ready it is, mate."

Frank was all ready for the suddenly conceived undertaking. They started around the lake.

To facilitate matters Frank went along one shore and the captain along the other.

This was a division of forces, and in some cases might have seemed dangerous. But they feared no enemies or no attack.

Frank went on rapidly along the north shore. He scanned the shores closely and examined every spot which seemed to afford the possible chance of an outlet.

But he found none.

He became more than ever convinced that the outlet was by means of the channel they had passed in coming hither.

He pressed on rapidly.

Part of the time he could see the captain on the other shore. But a part of the way he was invisible.

Frank reached the upper end of the basin and halted. He looked for the captain to appear.

But he had not got along.

Time passed.

Still he did not come into view. Still Frank had no fears, until suddenly he heard a distant rifle shot.

Instantly he started to his feet. This could mean but two things.

Either the captain was embroiled with a foe, or he was otherwise in trouble and fired a signal.

Whichever it was it demanded an answer.

Frank lifted his rifle and fired, at the same time setting out along the shore.

In a moment a distant shot was heard. It was the answer.

Frank was satisfied now.

"The old fellow is in trouble," he muttered. "I must hasten."

On he ran over the rough shore. It seemed an interminable length of time. But he had proceeded fully a mile when he burst upon a startling scene.

High up in the forks of a mangrove sat the captain. At the base of the tree was the cause of his alarm.

It was a curious saurian of the crocodile type, and immense in size. It hovered at the foot of the tree, snapping its jaws and eying its intended victim.

"Heigho!" shouted Frank, "here's a pretty mess."

"Look out!" yelled the captain, "he'll be after yew, mate. He's a bad one, I tell ye!"

But Frank needed no warning. He kept at a respectful distance from the monster.

"Why don't you shoot it?" he asked, "it is a close range for you."

"It ain't any use, mate," replied the captain. "I've tried every way I could, but a bullet don't seem to affect him any more nor a straw."

"Well, keep steady where you are," said Frank. "I'll try and help you out of the scrape."

"All right, mate!"

Frank made his way cautiously around the tree, studying the saurian the while, and apparently looking for a vulnerable spot in its armor.

This it did not seem easy to do. The creature's scales doubtless would turn bullets aside as if they were but peas.

The only chance Frank could see was the eye. He accordingly cried:

"Try a shot at his eye, captain, and I will do the same."

"Ay, ay, mate!" replied the skipper, loquaciously. "Here's for a try."

With which he raised his rifle and fired. Evidently the shot was not a success, for the saurian did not stir.

Frank had now got in a good line with the creature's eyeballs, and took a careful and steady aim. Then he pulled the trigger.

Straight to the mark the bullet went. The saurian emitted a terrible roar and flourished its tail. It turned its head, and Frank saw that the eye had been extinguished.

But the shot had not proved fatal. However, if he could blind the creature, it might be just as effective, so he tried another shot.

CHAPTER VII.

IN AN UNDERGROUND LABYRINTH.

FRANK aimed for the other eye. He fired twice.

But each shot went wide. The creature moved at a critical moment. Nothing daunted, the young inventor aimed again.

Crack!

Once more the saurian gave a wail of pain, and this time began to stagger and plunge wildly about. The other eye was destroyed and it was blind.

"Now, captain," shouted Frank, "the creature cannot see you. Let us get out of here!"

"Right ye are, mate," agreed the old sailor, sliding down out of the tree. "I've no liking for staying here!"

He kept the tree between him and the crocodile and quickly joined Frank. They did not attempt to finish the creature, but set out rapidly as possible for a return to the other shore of the lake.

It had been an exciting episode, but it was not the last they were to experience that day.

However, they rounded the lake and were once more at their starting point. They had satisfied themselves that the lake had no visible outlet.

"Unless that channel which we passed can connect with it," said Frank, "it has no outlet."

"The outlet can't be seen."

"That is true. Do you think this water is on a level with that in the channel?"

"Pretty nigh it."

"Then you may depend upon it there is a connection."

"In which case—"

"We must go back and do some submarine exploring," said Frank; "before we go any further I want to solve the mystery of this lake."

"Correct!" agreed the captain. "An' I believe ye kin do it, mate. So here we go."

They set out for the shore on their return to the Eel. Rapidly they made their way over the grassy plain.

Soon they reached the long ridge below which lay the channel or creek. Here they paused to again examine it.

Then Frank became convinced that there was a connection between it and the lake. He was at once deeply interested in the affair.

"We shall find something interesting I know in exploring this channel," he said, "I believe it is the key to the mystery of the island."

"I hope ye're right, skipper," declared the captain.

Very soon now they reached the shore. Here they found their boat high and dry.

It was but a moment's work to put it into the surf and soon they were on their way back to the Eel.

Barney and Pomp had been waiting anxiously for their appearance and were delighted at their safe return.

"Be me sowl, if yez hadn't av come back soon I should have gone after yez fer fear something had happened yez!" declared the Celt.

"Well, your fears are at an end now!" laughed Frank, "but we've lively work before us."

The young inventor went at once into the pilot-house and started the boat ahead. He kept along in the cover of the cliffs keeping a sharp eye out for the reefs.

In this manner they had soon reached the mouth of the channel. Here the water was found amply deep enough to allow the boat to enter.

The Eel shot into the channel and at once started to follow its course. Pomp, in the bow, took soundings.

Steadily the Eel made its way through the channel. It was not long before it had entered the basin and reached the mouth of the cavern.

The rest of its course, if it extended further, was underground. The submarine boat sailed into the cavern.

But the cavern roof quickly came down to the surface of the water, and it became necessary for the Eel to travel under water.

However, this was easy enough.

The boat sank until within sight of the bottom. The search-light showed the cavern walls for some distance ahead.

And, as it slowly groped its way through the underground passage, Frank and the captain studied the situation. Suddenly the young inventor exclaimed:

"Do you notice anything peculiar about those walls, captain?"

"Eh?" exclaimed the old sailor. "They look pretty clean cut, eh?"

"They look like the work of human hands. I can almost see the drill holes and the marks of the picks. Can they have been cut by man?"

The captain drew a breath.

"It mought be," he muttered. "There's no tellin'. It's certain that they look that way."

"Eh? What's this?"

Frank came to a sudden stop. The boat was held steady in its position. There was cause for his surprise.

To the right another passage diverged from this one. A little ways further on another deflected to the left.

Which one of these passages, if any, led into the lake?

Was it likely that any of them did? Was it not possible that the entire island was honeycombed, and was perhaps a mere shell?

All sorts of curious thoughts flashed through Frank's mind. A dozen hypotheses presented themselves to him.

But which of them might be correct? What course was it best to pursue?

He decided to finally keep the straight course, and if possible trust to luck in reaching the lake. At least he must not turn back until he had solved the mystery.

So the Eel kept straight on. As it proceeded, other passages of a similar kind were noted.

Frank was upon the alert and let nothing escape his gaze. At length he called Cook to him, and said:

"I am sure that these galleries were never made by nature!"

The captain stared at him.

"Well, mate, you may be right," he said, "but how do you account for their being made by human beings? What would they build 'em for, anyway?"

Frank shook his head.

"We shall learn in course of time," he said.

And thus the matter dropped. The Eel kept on, and now Frank was confronted with an astonishing fact.

It was full time that they should be in the lake. Certainly they had traveled a sufficient distance.

But yet the blank walls of the passage were upon either hand. In fact, they seemed interminable.

And this fact puzzled Frank not a little. Still he kept on.

Another hour passed. Yet they were in the passage. Certainly it must be a roundabout way to the lake, else they should be there long since.

Could it be possible that they had taken the wrong passage? Ought they to have turned off into one of the other galleries?

A chill of apprehension settled down upon the young inventor. It seemed certainly true.

He was so impressed with the fact that he impulsively brought the Eel to a stop. Cook came rushing into the pilot-house.

"What's the matter, skipper?" he cried. "What's happened?"

"Nothing," replied Frank, quietly, "only I'm a little puzzled to know where we are. Can you tell?"

The captain stared at Frank, and his face blanched.

"We ought to be in the lake."

"Certainly we ought!"

"But we ain't?"

"No!"

"Where are we?"

There was no reply to this query. For some moments silence reigned. Then Frank finally arose.

He began to reverse the electric engines. The boat moved backwards.

"Where are ye going?" asked the captain.

"I am going back the way we came," said Frank. "I am satisfied that we can never reach the lake by this route."

Cook drew a breath of relief.

"That's a good plan, mate," he said, "we're better off out of here!"

"So I think!"

The submarine boat receded slowly down the passage. For hours it kept on its backward course.

By Frank's calculation it was time that they should emerge. And they did emerge, but not into the open air.

Instead it was into a small circular chamber. From this passages extended in all directions.

Frank shut off the engines and gazed appalled at the scene.

"My soul!" he gasped. "We are lost!"

"Lost!" echoed Cook.

Barney and Pomp came fearfully in. The same awful realization rested cloud-like upon all.

Words cannot express the sensations of our submarine voyagers at that moment. Lost in that awful labyrinth!

What a horrible thought! What was to be done?

Of course they were not as yet anywhere near starvation. There were supplies aboard for months. But would even that length of time enable them to find their way out?

If it did not then they were doomed to a fearful fate. The Eel would be their coffin, the underground passage their tomb.

Discussion elicited no clear idea as to what course it was best to pursue. They were completely dumfounded.

The Eel rested in the little cavern chamber for hours. Frank went into his cabin and gave himself up to a study of the dilemma. He was never so perplexed in his life.

After some hours utter exhaustion demanded a period of rest. Barney went on guard and the others retired to their staterooms.

The Celt was much exhausted himself and nearly fell asleep a dozen times. There seemed little need of keeping guard for surely no foe could reach them where they were.

So the Celt may be excused a little if he did doze a bit. After a long time, however, he was relieved by Pomp.

But Frank and the captain were now aroused and came into the pilot-house.

"There is but one thing we can do," said the young inventor, "and that is wander through these passages at random in the hope of sometime striking the right way out."

"That's right, mate!" agreed the captain, "an' time is mighty valuable."

"So it is," said Frank, touching the tank lever to raise the boat. He gave it a full swing.

There was a distant clattering sound and the hiss of the pneumatic press. But the boat did not arise.

CHAPTER VIII.

RUN AROUND.

FRANK stared at the lever. It was wide open.

And yet the boat remained on the floor of the cavern. What did it mean? Had the machinery given out?

With a ghastly face Frank examined the key board. Everything seemed to be all right. What did it mean?

He went below and examined the tank and connections. There was no visible break, and he saw that there was no water in the tank.

"Something is holding us down," he muttered. "What can it be?"

He went to the pilot house window and looked out.

"How clear the water looks," he exclaimed. Then a great cry broke from the lips of all, a cry of simultaneous discovery.

There was no water in the galleries, nothing but air.

In some mysterious way they had emptied themselves during the night! This left the submarine boat on the cavern floor. No wonder that the tank did not respond to its mechanism.

It was some while before any in the party recovered enough to speak. All were literally astonished.

Of course there was no explanation to offer of the receding of the water. Neither was a clear way to be seen out of the predicament.

For a predicament it certainly was, of the most extraordinary kind.

How was the submarine boat to be got out of the labyrinth, even should they get out themselves? It surely could not be carried out.

"We are ruined, mates!" declared the captain. "We never kin get off this island without that boat."

"That is true," agreed Frank. "But can you explain the receding of the water?"

"No."

"Have we any assurance that it will not return at any moment?"

"Not the least, skipper."

"Then how shall we dare to leave the boat to, if possible, find our way out of here?"

"Thar's only one way," said the captain, deliberately. "We've got to take chances an' leave the ship behind us!"

This, however, seemed an act of madness. None were impressed favorably with it.

The door was opened and all crowded out on deck. A good breath of air came through the passage. This caused Frank a renewed thrill of hope.

"This is a powerful draught," he said, "of course, it must come from the outer world."

"Right!" agreed the captain, "kin ye tell which way it comes?"

"There is a way to tell," said Frank.

He went into the cabin and came out with a slip of paper. This he held up in the draught.

It was easy to see the direction of the wind by the way this was blown. It came strongest from one of the north passages.

"That is the nearest way out of this place," declared Frank. "I dare say the distance is not very great."

The captain eagerly clasped his arm.

"Let a couple of us try it!" he cried, "if the water comes in again we will trust to our legs to get back again!"

Frank hesitated a moment; then he said:

"You and I will be the ones to take the risk."

"Agreed!" cried the captain, joyfully.

And so the matter was settled. They quickly equipped themselves for the hazardous undertaking.

To guard against the possibility of getting lost, Frank adopted the plan of Jason in the labyrinth of Crete, taking a number of spools of thread with him to pay out as they proceeded.

Thus they set out. Barney and Pomp, with special instructions, remained behind.

The passage selected by Frank and the captain seemed to be higher and broader than the others. The draught increased as they went on.

This gave them renewed confidence. Moreover, their spirits were higher, when suddenly a light was seen far ahead.

It was daylight.

They pushed forward eagerly. Soon the open mouth of the passage was seen. Frank could not help a conjecture.

"Probably we will come out into the lake basin," he said.

"That's what I'm thinkin'," agreed the captain. "Heigho! here we are!"

They rapidly neared the mouth of the passage. Soon they emerged altogether. Then Frank's conjecture was seen to have been correct.

They were in the basin of the lake. Its high rocky walls and clogged floor lay before them.

For some while they gazed upon the scene with interest. Then Frank drew a deep breath.

"So this is the abode of the red demons and spirits, eh?" he asked. With surprise he noted that the old captain was all of a tremble.

"Yes," replied Cook, who was by no means free from the sailor's natural superstition; "this is the place, mate. It's rather shaky lookin' now, ain't it?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Frank, with a tinge of contempt.

"I've seen a much worse."

"Humph!" rejoined Cook, "it looks all right now. But wait until after dark. Then I tell you——"

"Eh!" exclaimed Frank, with a violent start forward, "that's queer. Do spooks and demons leave footprints in the sand like those?"

There, plainly visible in the sands, were the unmistakable footprints of men. They were speedily lost in shaly ground beyond.

The captain's eyes were wild and staring.

"Great whales!" he ejaculated, "those hev been made since the water went out."

"Yes," agreed Frank, "within an hour, and the sands are not dry yet."

This astounding discovery for a moment palled upon both. It added to the mystery of the isle.

But the mystery was intensified in that very moment. For a sound came to the ears of both which gave them a queer thrill.

It was a dull, regular sound, and metallic in its ring. There was no mistaking its character.

"Somebody's doing some drilling near here," declared Frank.

"That is the sound of drill and sledge."

The captain's face was white.

He clutched Frank's arm.

"Let's go back!" he whined.

"Go back?" echoed Frank.

"Yes!"

"What for?"

"I tell ye the devil is in it. We'll be in heaps of trouble if we stay here!"

Frank stared at his companion. He could not understand such cowardice.

"You may go back!" he said, quietly, "but if you do send Barney out here to join me. I'm going to know what this means!"

The captain took a brace.

Frank walked cautiously along the bed of the lake basin. The sounds of the sledge and drill became less audible.

He paused.

"It is evidently not out here!" he muttered, and then going back placed his ear against the cavern wall. He could hear it plainer.

This settled the matter in his opinion. The drilling was going on in some one of the passages.

What did it mean?

Who were the mysterious passage diggers, and why were they thus undermining the island? Why should they flood the passages at intervals, and where did they go while they were flooded?

All these queries came to Frank most forcibly. None of them were very easy to answer.

Of course the mysterious diggers were human beings. He would not listen for a moment to Cook's hair-brained theories.

But who were they?

Island natives or civilized beings? He was determined to find out. Frank's curiosity was thoroughly aroused. He was not the one to brook opposition or suffer discouragement.

He made his way along the passage wall, listening and trying to locate the miners.

But the further he went the fainter grew the sounds. At no point were they so audible as right at this spot.

Allowing this where were the unknown miners! They must be in the near vicinity. After much study Frank changed his tactics.

He proceeded to carefully explore the floor of the basin. His purpose in this he did not explain to the captain, who watched him somewhat curiously.

Frank went nearly around the basin, then he crossed it.

Finally he returned to the spot where Cook was waiting, and there was a comprehensive light in his eyes.

"Well," interrogated the captain; "what have ye found out?"

"Much," replied Frank. "I think I understand the character of this work now."

"Ye do?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"It's my belief that these passages dug in the island, are all the work of human beings, very much human and insatiate in their lust for gold."

The captain's eyes opened.

"Ye think they're gold miners?"

"I do!"

"Well, they kin find it here."

"Surely. This entire basin has been excavated by them and the gold bearing quartz taken out. Probably it has found its way to a stamp mill."

The captain was silent a few moments, then he said:

"Wall, that don't account for the little red demons."

Frank gave an exclamation of impatience.

"Pshaw!" he said; "that was all your imaginintion, Cook."

The captain bristled up.

"Not so!" he said with asperity. "There were my shipmates too, ye remember. What of them?"

"Well, we will drop that preposterous story," said Frank wearily; "let us confine ourselves to facts as we find them. That is the best plan. One thing is sure; this whole island is overrun with gold seekers. Whether they are white or native, I can't say."

"Can ye tell me what they do with their gold?" asked the captain incredulously. "Whar do they crush their quarts and extract the metal?"

"The island has not given up its secrets yet," said Frank. "When it does we may know all. One thing is sure; I intend to know them before I attempt to return home."

With which remark he returned to the passage.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ERUPTION.

"WALL," grumbled the captain, "it's all right enough to talk, but kin yew tell me how we're ever going to return home with the submarine boat lost in this hole?"

"We must find our way out with her," said Frank. "We can easily run her out into the lake."

"But how wil' ye git out of the lake?" asked the captain.

"Blow our way out with dynamite, if no other way offers."

Cook said no more. He saw that he was dealing with a master spirit, and a mind superior to his own.

In a few moments they had reached the submarine boat, and were warmly met by Barney and Pomp.

"Och hone, Misster Frank," cried the Celt; "howiver shall we be after gittin' out at this place at all, at all?"

"Golly, Marse Frank, I done hope yo' ain' gwine to stay yere berry long!"

"Not any longer than I can help," said Frank; "so possess your souls in patience, all of you. I think we shall find a way out when the right time comes. One thing is sure—we cannot carry the submarine boat out in our arms."

So the matter dropped. Pomp busied himself getting a meal, and Barney went back to work on the electric engines.

All partook of Pomp's culinary efforts with avidity. They had hardly been disposed of when a curious sound was heard.

It was a gentle swish-swash of water. All sprung up and rushed out on deck.

The truth was seen.

The labyrinth was filling up again. Already the water was over the keel of the submarine boat.

Frank hastened to close the boat up. He was now in hearty spirits.

"We shall be all right now," he declared. "We can easily find our way into the lake."

It required some hours for the labyrinth to fill up. But after a time the Eel was able to float.

It was then but a few moments' work to thread the passage to the lake. Here she rose to the surface.

But night had fallen and an Egyptian darkness rested over all. The search-light's rays went dancing across the surface of the lake.

It did not seem as if anything could be accomplished until daylight should come. But at that moment a strange thing occurred.

Far in the distance across the waters a strange sound was heard. It was a shrill, eerie cry, which went quavering among the hills like the wail of a lost spirit.

"Jericho!" exclaimed the captain. "What dew yew call that?"

"Ugh!" exclaimed Frank, with a shiver; "that was an unpleasant sound!"

The search-light traveled in that direction. The wall of the mountain was seen and the shore of the lake. But this was all.

Nothing was seen or heard after that of unusual sort. But the incident was not forgotten.

Frank could not help but associate it with the mysterious workers of the underground mines. Truly this was an island of mystery.

The night passed slowly and without further incident.

When daylight came the lake lay smooth and tranquil about them. It was hard to imagine that they had ever been in the strange labyrinth.

The Eel traveled slowly around the little body of water. But no outlet was presented.

They were some distance from the ocean. How to reach this, even by the way they had come, was a conundrum.

It did not seem a possible feat. Frank was not a little nonplussed.

He even had thought of running the boat ashore and constructing a sluiceway from the lake to the sea to float it thither.

Or, perhaps to make a sliding railway of greased logs. Many wild plans came to him.

But he did not at once decide upon any. He was content to wait and watch for new developments.

These seemed to be promised at an early hour. Nothing was to be seen or heard of the mysterious occupants of the isle, but their power might be felt at any time.

Frank and the captain discussed the situation even more thoroughly. They did not, of course, agree on all points.

The captain still clung to his faith in the supernatural. Frank pooh-poohed it.

Thus half the day passed. Then suddenly a new factor in the problem appeared.

Nature took a hand in the game. Nor did she make half way work of it either.

A sudden distant boom was followed by a trembling of the earth. It sounded like the roar of distant artillery on a battlefield.

"Begorra, phwat's that?" cried Barney. "Shure I belave it's a sea-fight."

"Golly! what ships wud be jest makin' a fight in dis paht ob de world?" asked Pomp, incredulously.

"Mebbe they're pirates, yez ignoramus!" retorted Barney.

"Huh!" sniffed Pomp. "I reckon dat dey ain't no pirates nobow nowadays. Dey am all hanged long ago!"

"That's all yez know about it. Shure, phwat av the Chinayse pirates an' ther Malays, ter be shure!"

"Dey neber git down in dis yere paht ob de world," said Pomp, incredulously, "kaint fool dis chile. But it am somefin. Jest hear de likes ob dat!"

"Och, hone! it's an airthquake!"

Indeed this latter assumption of Barney's seemed the most likely. That it was an earthquake might be true.

The lake swelled and rose in great tidal waves. The mountain seemed to reel and the sky darkened.

Then with a terrific report, as if the world was rent asunder, the

top of the great mountain seemed to split, and great columns of flame a thousand feet high shot up.

Flame and smoke and ashes rose to a frightful height. This phenomenon explained all.

The mountain was in a state of volcanic eruption. This was evidently a periodic event.

The sight was something grand and awful, and certainly one never to be forgotten.

Dazed, and not a little terror stricken, the submarine voyagers watched the scene.

They realized now their fatal mistake in having attempted to enter the lake. They wished themselves well out to sea.

Great clouds of ashes now began falling. Down the mountain slope came terrible boiling currents of lava.

These swept away sections of the forest and turned all water in the course into hissing bursts of steam.

And still the terrible eruption kept on. The lava even ran into the lake, but not in sufficient quantity to do serious harm.

The cloud which overhung the mountain top so overshadowed the lake, that it was almost like night upon its surface. What the end would be only our friends could divine.

They conjured up all sorts of terrible things.

There was the possibility that the island might become sundered by the awful convulsion, or sink into the seas.

Again the molten matter from the volcano might spread over it and destroy every vestige of animal or vegetable life.

All these possibilities were dreadful to think upon, but fortunately for our friends none of them came to pass. But other things did.

Suddenly they noticed a startling fact.

"I say," cried the captain. "What's the matter with the lake, mates?"

"It's sinking," cried Frank, "mercy on us! What if the water leaves the basin dry and the volcano fills it up with red hot lava."

"Then our goose is cooked," cried the captain.

"You are right!"

It was true that the lake was falling. It was settling rapidly, the water going no one knew whither.

No explanation of the phenomenon could at the moment be vouchsafed. It was enough to consider it a fact.

The lake was fast disappearing. The submarine boat retreated to its farthest corner and there was left high and dry.

In a short while the bed of the lake was dry again. There was nothing for our voyagers to do but to await the result.

This they did. It was tedious work, but after a time the eruption partly elapsed, and the shower of falling ashes stopped.

Then our friends drew a good breath of fresh air. It was a great relief to them, for they were dry and parched with the awful dust.

For two days the submarine boat remained in the dry bed of the lake before any new development. Then thrilling events came thick and fast.

Frank and Barney chafed at the inactivity of their position. They could stand it no longer.

The captain was lame with an attack of rheumatism.

"Come, Barney," said the young inventor, "we'll gain nothing by lying about here. Let us get out and see what we can do."

"I'm wid yez, sor!" cried the Celt. "Yez kin count on me, sor!"

"I know it," said Frank. "We must make some sort of a move—we shall die here."

In a few moments both were on deck and equipped for their expedition. They went well armed.

"Good luck to ye!" declared the captain. "I hope ye'll learn a way out of this accursed hole."

"We will or we'll not come back," said Frank, resolutely.

Sliding down from the deck, the two adventurers were soon on their way along the edge of the basin. Frank was determined to carry out a new plan.

This was to visit the channel below where they had first entered the labyrinth. He was determined to learn if this was the point where the influx of water was stopped, and by what method it was done.

He believed that it was not the work of nature, but of man. Perhaps some clew to the character of the island dwellers could be gained.

Full of these things, Frank set forth, followed by Barney. They were not long in making their way down to the channel.

From this point exciting events were in store for them.

CHAPTER X.

DOOMED TO DIE.

AFTER some time Frank and Barney reached the channel and the mouth of the labyrinth.

Here they saw that it was also as dry as the basin of the lake. What did it mean?

The water had certainly flowed in from the ocean. Either the ocean had receded or a barrier had interposed.

If the latter, then it must be found between the entrance to the labyrinth and the coast.

Frank set out along the channel to settle this fact. They followed it patiently to almost its end.

Then, not a hundred yards from the sea, they came upon the barrier. This consisted of wooden gates rising upward from the bed of

the channel. They were operated by means of huge levers hidden in the jungle on either side.

Certainly this proved the agency of man, and shrewd man as well.

"Well, I'm beat," exclaimed Frank; "this explains a part of the mystery!"

"Be me sowl, it's very airy to see," declared Barney, "but phwe does the wather on the other soide go to?"

"That is easy to see," declared Frank, "in the bed of the basin there is an underground stream, which carries all water rapidly out of the basin and the labyrinth. It soon drains it."

"Begorra, however did yez see that?" cried Barney, admiringly.

"It was easy to see," replied Frank.

"Well then, phwat shall we do with these gates? Open thim and let wather in to fill up the lake again?"

Frank hesitated.

"On my word," he declared, "that is not a bad plan at all. I have half a mind to adopt it."

"Bejabers, I'd do it!"

But second thought told Frank better than this.

There were other things to be solved. In the first place, what was the object of the unknown miners in so often flooding the labyrinth and basin?

This point Frank wished to learn. What he did propose was this.

"Barney, I believe it will pay us to hide here and wait for the strange people who open and shut this gate to appear. We can then get a sight at them and see what they look like."

Barney hesitated but did not demur.

"All right, sor!" he agreed.

Some while they hovered about the spot. But no living being appeared.

Then Frank became restless.

After awhile he sauntered down to the sandy shore near by. It was then that he received an electrical start.

For there in the sands he saw the print of men's feet. There was also the mark of a boat's keel in the sand.

Instinctively Frank gazed out to sea. Then he gave a gasping cry:

"Look!" he almost screamed, "do you see it, Barney? It is a ship!"

Sure enough, standing out from the isle and not two miles distant

was a ship much of the pattern of the Santiago.

Words can hardly express the sensation of Frank and Barney.

"Begorra it is!" said the Celt.

"It has visited this shore."

"That's roight, sor!"

"But for what purpose? Why did they not look for castaways?"

Then he picked up some fragments of rock from the sand.

"Look!" he cried, "it is good quartz. That vessel had come here and has loaded up with this valuable ore. She is now en route to Chili, no doubt, with her most valuable cargo."

In that moment the whole secret of the Weird Island was revealed to Frank.

It was a veritable El Dorado for some syndicate of miners, probably Chilians who came here with ships, and secretly mined the gold and carried it away to the region of civilization.

This was why so much secrecy was observed in the mining operations. The gold diggers kept assiduously out of sight.

It was they who had honeycombed the island, the quartz probably yielding the largest returns. The flooding of the passages and lake basin was probably done at intervals after they had ceased work, so that possible visitors to the isle might not discover traces of their operations.

All was now as plain to Frank as a printed book. He no longer doubted the captain's stories of demons and ghostly sights.

These probably had been devised by the cunning miners to frighten the superstitious sailors away.

Frank drew a deep breath.

"Well," he muttered, "in that case, I don't know that we have any right here after all. The isle and the gold is theirs by right of prior discovery. But I should like to meet some of these shrewd fellows."

The words had hardly left his lips when Barney clutched his arm.

"Och hone, MISTER Frank," he exclaimed, in terror. "Shure, it's in a scrape we are now, sor."

"What do you mean?" asked Frank, in surprise.

Then he saw the cause of Barney's exclamation. For a moment the young inventor was disconcerted.

Back of them was an irregular line of boulders. Behind these were standing a half dozen masked men. Each held a carbine, which covered the two explorers.

"Buenos Senors," said a light mocking voice in Spanish, "to what do we owe the honor of this visit?"

Fortunately Frank understood Spanish and he replied:

"Jesu! take away your guns, senors!"

One of the Spaniards stepped out into view. He was a tall, finely-built man, with bold, resolute features.

"Not until you lay your arms down!" he said. "You are prisoners, senors!"

"We submit," said Frank. "We ask only fair treatment."

The other laughed.

"All intruders on the isle of gold receive that," he said; "of course the love of treasure has brought you here."

"No," replied Frank; "simply curiosity; my friend, the captain here, has visited this isle before."

The Spaniard gave a start.

"Oh! he has been here before!"

"Si senor!"

"When was that?"

Cook told the story of his visit. The Spaniard listened intently. Then he said:

"For a matter of form I must detain you as prisoners for a short while, senors. You will kindly submit."

There was no help for it. Resistance would be madness. Frank and Barney were obliged to yield.

The other masked man advanced and took their weapons. Then they were marched away across the isle.

They left the lake basin on the left and after a long climb finally reached the base of the volcano. Here they followed a tortuous path until passing between high walls of rock they came into a little pocket in the hills.

Here were a number of rude stone cabins. Scattered about were heaps of mining tools. This was evidently the rendezvous of the miners.

Barney and Frank were led into one of the stone huts and the door was barred upon them.

Thus left as prisoners they could do naught but gaze out of the barred windows and watch the island miners.

A score of them were gathered in the center of the place, and they seemed to be holding an excited confab.

This lasted a long time.

Then one of them came to the door of the hut, and said:

"Prepare yourselves, senors! Make your prayers, for it is decreed that you must die!"

"What!" cried Frank with horror. "You will not murder us? What have we done to harm you?"

"Our secret!" was the reply. "No outsider can become possessed of a knowledge of the Golden Isle and live!"

"Wretches!" cried Frank wildly, "you will not murder us! We have done you no harm! Your secret is safe with us!"

A mocking laugh was the only reply.

Barney and Frank stared at each other in awful horror. It was a fearful realization.

What could they do? Was there no way of escape? Better had it been for them if they had resisted in the first place and died struggling for their lives.

But after a time the door opened and a man entered. It was the tall man who had captured them.

He bowed politely.

"Buenos, senors," he said. "I have come to hear your story."

"Good!" said Frank. "I thought you could not be so inhuman as to take our lives without a trial."

But the other shook his head solemnly.

"It is the law of our company," he said. "No one can discover our secrets and go away to tell of it."

"But we have no such intention," began Frank.

A deprecatory wave of the hand interrupted him.

"Tell me your story, senor. Why did you come here?"

"Purely from curiosity," replied Frank. And then he gave an account of the captain's story, and how they had decided to visit the Weird Island.

The Spaniard's face lit up a trifle, and he said:

"Then you did not know that we had secret mines here?"

"No."

He appeared relieved. But yet the hardened, merciless light was in his eyes. Frank saw this, and said:

"What do you propose to do with us?"

The others lips tightened.

"I am very sorry for you," he said. "You were unfortunate in coming here. The law of our company is inexorable."

"And you intend to take our lives?" asked Frank quietly.

"I am afraid our people will demand that, senor."

Frank said no more. But his fertile brain was busy. Was there no way of escape?

He thought of Pomp and the captain. But they seemed helpless in the lake basin. The next move of the secret miners would doubtless be to capture them and the Eel.

In that event the worst would have happened. The young inventor was desperate.

Suddenly, however, his captor looked keenly at him, and asked:

"You spoke of a ship foundered in Cape Horn waters. What was her name?"

"The Santiago!" replied Frank.

The Spaniard gave a mighty cry and leaped to his feet. He trembled like an aspen while his face was deathly white.

"Jesus pity!" he screamed, "did you say Santiago, senor?"

"Yes!" replied Frank, wonderingly.

"And—her master—did you see any of the crew alive or did all perish?"

"We picked up one man and tried to bring him to life. But it was impossible. He died very soon after."

"Did he say nothing about the ship? Give you no explanation?"

CHAPTER XI.

A REVELATION.

"No!" replied Frank, something like an inkling of the other's meaning dawning upon him, "but we found papers on his person giving his name, and—"

"His name?"

"Si, senor!"

The other bent down with working pallid features and groaned:

"Tell me—quick! What was it?"

"Raoul de Carrero!"

The Spaniard gave an awful cry and reeled back to the door. For a few moments he was in a paroxysm of distress.

"That is why we did not hear from her," he cried; "then the Santiago is lost and Raoul my brother is dead—dead! And all owing to this accursed gold. Curse it! Curse it, I say. I want no more of it."

For some moments he raved incoherently. Then after a time he became calm.

He sat for some time eying the prisoners vacantly. Then he aroused and said:

"Pardon me, senors; it was a great blow. Let me explain. You have brought me dire news. The Santiago was our best ship, and on her way from Madrid, where she had carried gold to deposit in the Bank of Spain. Raoul Carrero was my brother. I am Jose Carrero. I was to have sailed with him upon his return, and we would have left this accursed isle forever! Had you saved his life, I would have spared yours."

He arose with these words and passed out of the hut.

Frank and Barney exchanged glances. This was a revelation.

"That explains the connection of Raoul Carrero with this isle," said Frank.

"Shure enough, sor."

"The mystery is all out now. The Weird Island is divested of its weirdness. But we are in a bad scrape."

"That's the truth on it, sor," agreed the Celt. "But we might as well die fightin', an' ave ye say the worruld, we'll make a break for it."

Neither had been bound. The door of the hut was partly open.

But men were in the pocket, and armed guards were at the entrance.

Frank saw at once that it would be an act of utter folly. So he shook his head.

"We will gain nothing by that," he said, "it will be better to wait. Perhaps Carrero may relent."

So they sat down upon a wooden bench and awaited results. Presently a file of armed men approached.

The hut door was opened and the men entered. One of them made a motion to the prisoners to follow.

They did so and soon were crossing the pocket to the far side. They were here placed with their backs to the cliff wall.

Four of the men with carbines faced them. Then Frank saw that the death order was to be carried out.

A horrible wave of despair swept over him. He tried to cry out, but his tongue rattled dryly in his mouth.

"God help us!" he groaned, inwardly, "this is the end!"

The four men had raised their carbines. A moment more and the fate of the prisoners would have been sealed.

But at that moment a loud cry caused them to halt. From one of the huts a man bounded forth.

It was Carrero!

He came up angrily.

"What is this?" he cried. "Would you shoot these men?"

"By your orders," said the leader of the carbineers.

"But—I countermand them. Take the men back to the hut. I am not ready—I must have more time."

The carbineers dropped their weapons to their sides. Then Frank and Barney were marched back to their former quarters.

"Just as I thought," whispered the young inventor; "he has relented."

An hour passed.

Then the door of the hut opened and Carrero entered. He addressed them civilly, saying:

"Pardon me, senors, for detaining you here. You are strangers to me, and I was not sure I could trust you."

"We mean you no harm," said Frank, "and if you assassinate us, our blood will be upon your head."

Carrero bowed.

"I do not wish it," he said. "I am satisfied of your honesty. It matters not me now, for I shall leave the Isle of Gold forever. You were kind to my dying brother Raoul. For that I am grateful. Freedom is yours."

He opened the door of the hut. Frank and Barney walked out.

"You may return to your boat," continued Carrero, "and you will not be molested. But I advise you to remain no longer here."

"We have no desire to do that," replied Frank; "had we known this island was claimed or in possession of another, we would not have encroached here."

"I believe you," said Carrero, with a profound bow.

Frank and Barney passed out of the little mountain pocket. They were soon on their way to the lake basin.

As they reached it they saw the Eel yet resting upon the sand bar where they had left it.

Pomp and the captain came out on deck as they approached.

"Hang me high!" roared the old sailor; "we thought the demons had got ye!"

"And so they did," replied Frank.

The captain's eyes opened wide.

"Eh?" he ejaculated.

"That is the truth," declared Frank.

With that he gave a narrative of their experiences. The captain and Pomp listened in amazement.

The mystery of the Weird Island was solved at last. The captain's superstitious fancies were obliterated.

"Now, I've had all of this place I want," declared Frank. "I am in favor of getting to sea at once. We can cruise awhile among the archipelagoes if we choose."

"Good," cried the captain; "I'm with ye heart an' hand, skipper! Let's get out of this hole!"

"Bejabers, that don't look to me to be so drefful aisy," said Barney. And all were bound to admit that this was true. How were they to get back from the lake basin to the sea?

While considering this problem, Frank suddenly heard a distant hail. He looked up and saw Jose Carrero on the ledgy shore of the basin.

"Peace to you, senor," he cried. "May I come aboard and have a talk?"

"Certainly," replied Frank.

In a few moments the lithe Spaniard came down over the rail and stood on deck. He gazed wonderingly about him.

"So this is the wonderful craft which can sail under the sea?" he asked.

"It is," replied Frank.

"Ah, it is wonderful! We thought we had drowned you like rats in a trap when you entered our mine. But you came up in the lake without any trouble or harm."

"It did us no harm," replied Frank. "This is a submarine craft."

"Yes; but I have business to do with you, senor. I have talked with my men. I am desirous of leaving the isle. I have sickened of it. But my men are mutinous. They will not go."

"Indeed!"

"I have offered them the alternative. They decided to stay and work the mine until our ship, the *Donna Maria*, returns. In the meanwhile I shall die here. Whither will you sail, senor?"

"We will cruise a little among the islands of the Pacific, and then sail for home."

"Ah, will you not change that plan? Land me first in Santiago, and I will pay you a large sum."

Frank gazed at the Spaniard and saw the eager light in his eyes. He hesitated but a moment.

Then he said:

"I do not want your money, Senor. I will be glad to gratify your request and land you in Chili free of charge."

Carrero fairly embraced Frank.

"But first of all," said the young inventor, "I wish to ask you how we will get out of this infernal place?"

The Spaniard looked surprised.

"Return the way you came," he said.

"But it is the worst labyrinth I ever attempted to solve," said Frank.

Carrero nodded his head.

"I see," he cried. "I will help you! I know every passage. I can guide you safely out."

"Very good," said Frank, "but we cannot travel without water."

Carrero looked at the dry basin of the lake and shrugged his shoulders. He leaped over the rail.

"I will bring water here quickly," he said. "I need but to open the gates below here!"

And he disappeared in the direction of the gates. Frank turned and gripped hands with the captain.

"We're out of a good scrape," he said. "We are sure to escape from here, and I, for one, have had enough of the Weird Island."

"So have I," agreed the captain.

A cry from Barney at this moment drew their attention. The Celt pointed across the basin.

"Shure, do yez see that, sor?"

A score of armed men were descending into the basin from the other side. They were pressing hastily toward the boat.

The were the companions of Carrero, the secret miners. This it was easy enough to see. But what was their errand?

"Mercy!" cried Frank in horror. "They will be drowned when the waters come into the basin! Shout to them! Warn them of their peril!"

"Ye're right!" cried the captain. "Heigho thar, ye landlubbers, sheer off for higher land!"

"The water!" cried Frank. "You will be drowned! Go back—go back!"

To the amazement of all the miners came on. They answered the warning with a yell of derision, and even fired a shot or two at the party on the Eel's deck.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Frank, "they mean to attack us! Get under cover or you'll get hit!"

All retreated into the cabin. They had scarcely done so when a distant rumble was heard, and water came pouring out of the passages.

Down into the basin it swept in a flood. The miners paused aghast and then fled for their lives.

But they had been half way across the place and they could not escape the clutch of the water.

It swept down upon them and enveloped them. Frank let the Eel drift in that awful current and the voyagers were on deck to try and rescue any of the wretches possible.

But they might as well have spared their pains.

Not one of them escaped from the vortex. In a very short space of time the basin was filled, and beneath the placid waters were a score of dead men. The horror of the affair was beyond description.

It could be defined strictly as the fault of none but the miners themselves.

They had revolted against the plan of their leader Carrero. Their

purpose in attacking our voyagers was a murderous one, for they yet upheld the principle of allowing no one possessed of the secret of the mines to leave the isle alive.

But a terrible stroke of fate had overtaken them. It was indeed too dreadful to think upon.

A few moments later Carrero appeared upon the other shore. He shouted and waved his arms in signal to the voyagers.

Frank sent the Eel quickly across and took him aboard.

"Now, senor," cried the Spaniard, "we are ready to make the open sea. The gates are open and the course clear."

"And your men are all dead at the bottom of this lake!" said Frank.

Carrero gave an awful start.

"What?" he gasped.

The story was quickly told. Strong man that he was, the horror of the thing was too much for Carrero. He gave a dull groan and fell in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH IS THE END.

CARRERO was brought out of his faint with difficulty. When he did finally recover he groaned:

"Oh, to think that it was by my hand that they were destroyed!"

"You forget," said Frank, "that by so doing you saved our lives. They were coming to destroy us. It was all an accident anyway, and you were not directly responsible."

This reassured Carrero much, and he recovered himself in a measure.

But he said:

"Let us get away from this accursed isle as quickly as possible. I cannot bear to remain here!"

"We will do so," agreed Frank.

He was about to open the tank lever and sink the boat when a terrific boom sounded from the mountain.

Then up into the sky shot a mighty column of flame and smoke. It was an awful spectacle.

"Another eruption!" exclaimed Frank, "if it is as bad as the last our stay here will not be of the safest."

"You are right!" agreed Carrero; "let us go, senor; let us go before another catastrophe overtakes us!"

Frank gave one farewell glance at the flaming mountain. Then he pressed the lever open.

Instantly the submarine boat went down. The search-light showed the bed of the lake basin.

Frank steered for the cavernous opening to the mine. Into this the boat glided. Soon they were in the depths of the labyrinth.

Carrero bent over the rail in the pilot-house and studied the passage walls. But they looked vastly different to him in the water.

However, he gave directions in a terse and hoarse voice. The boat glided on. Barney was at the wheel.

Time passed on. Twenty, thirty minutes elapsed. An hour passed by.

Then Carrero was silent. A vexed light shone in his eyes.

Frank, who had been watching him narrowly, said:

"How is it, senor?"

"It is very strange," replied the Spaniard. "I don't understand it. We should have emerged long since!"

"The passages are very confusing."

"True! they look different under water. Ah, caramba, we are out!"

Even as he spoke the walls of the passage ceased. They were in open water at last.

With a cry of joy Carrero sprung up. Frank touched the tank valve and the boat leaped upward.

Up she went to the surface like a shot. The voyagers looked to see walls of the channel which led to the sea.

But they were instead rewarded with an astounding surprise.

"Perdie!" ejaculated Carrero. "We are fools!"

The submarine boat floated upon the waters of the lake again. They had pursued an exasperating course and had simply returned to the very spot they had started from.

Words cannot express their dismay. What was more an awful danger yawned over them.

The volcano seemed in a terrible series of convulsions.

It was reeling and rocking with the awful violence of the eruptions. The waters of the lake were already boiling with the red hot lava which flowed in an awful stream into it.

To remain on the lake much longer must have been to court death.

Fearful meteors were shooting down into the waters any one of which might sink the boat.

"Bejabers, we'd better get out av this," cried Barney. "Av we shtay here any longer its kilt we'll be."

Frank looked at Carrero.

"What shall we do?" he said. "We can save our lives by deserting the boat and cutting across country to the coast. Or we can try the labyrinth again."

"We must try it again," said the Spaniard, desperately. "I will find the way out this time."

"All right."

Down went the Eel again. Once more they entered the mine.

But this time it was under different circumstances. The water was in terrific commotion and the walls of the passage were violently shaken.

Frank was quite pale. A terrible fear assailed him. He saw the same thing in the captain's face.

"An earthquake," muttered the old sailor. "What if it closes up these passages? We're lost, shipmates!"

There was no doubt but that the island was in the throes of an earthquake.

Frank now regretted that they had left the lake.

The horror of being hemmed in those subterranean passages was awful. What a living tomb! What a dreadful fate!

"On—on!" gasped Carrero. "It is our only hope. Here, turn to the right. I know this passage. Oh, Mary, have mercy!"

The exclamation was well warranted.

Suddenly the walls of the passage began to crumble. Barney shut off the speed instantly.

He was not a moment too soon.

The wall shut down in front of the submarine boat. It was blocked up. They could go no further in that direction.

For a moment the white faced voyagers could do naught but gaze at each other. Then Frank took the wheel.

He reversed the engines and sent the boat back through the passage. On it crept until it came out into another gallery.

Then he started the Eel down this.

"Where are you going, señor?" asked Carrero, hoarsely.

"I can hardly tell," said Frank, calmly. "I am going at random. If Providence brings us out of this we may be thankful. If not we are lost!"

Intently now all stared ahead down the passage. The search-light's glare was powerful.

On crept the Eel.

Suddenly it began to rock and pitch violently. Then a surging of waters by it caused all to look behind. Frank threw the search-light's rays back.

The wall in their rear had fallen. Retreat was cut off. It was now time for despair.

At what moment they might be hemmed in now they could only guess. Death had its grim clutch upon them.

With bated breath all watched the cavern ahead.

Suddenly Carrero clutched Frank's arm wildly.

"I know this spot," he said, "it is not far from the channel of exit. We may come out yet!"

Wild yearning hope sprung up in the bosoms of all. Steadily onward crept the submarine boat.

The earthquake had relaxed its fierce convulsions. But at what moment it might return it was not easy to say.

No word was spoken.

All was suspense, expectancy. All were upon the qui-vive.

Slowly the walls of the passage began to broaden. Then some fearful force behind hurled the boat forward. The ram striking the passage wall was bent upward.

Every one on board was thrown from his feet. Frank managed to cling to the wheel.

"We are dead men!" screamed Captain Cook, wildly, "the island is going to pieces."

Indeed this seemed the truth. The walls of the passage were reeling and falling. A fearful ominous roaring sound filled the ears of all.

Then an animal like cry burst from the lips of Carrero!

"Jesu preserve us!" he yelled. "We will escape—we will! Life, life is ours! Comrades, we live!"

At that moment the walls of the passage ceased to be. Frank knew that they had again emerged into open water.

And there was good reason to believe that it was not the lake this time. He touched the tank lever.

The Eel sprung upwards.

Up she went and shot above the surface. A glance was enough.

They were in the basin at the head of the channel. It was not a mile to the sea. Safety was before them.

But the scene was one never to be forgotten. The vast mountain which had been in such fearful throes seemed not half its size.

It was apparently being rapidly reduced to a tithe of its former size. Awful black clouds of smoke and ashes obscured the sun.

It was really as if the world was coming to an end. Fearful depression was upon the spirits of all.

"Come, let us out of this," cried Carrero, "the isle is going to pieces. We shall go with it."

Frank needed no further bidding; he sent the Eel ahead down the channel with all speed.

That run to the sea was quickly made, but as they came to the surf line, a strange state of affairs was revealed.

The water was almost over the high cliffs. New bays and great reaches inland were formed.

"What can that mean?" cried Frank, in surprise. "Is it a tidal wave?"

"That is almost always the accompaniment of an earthquake," agreed Carrero, "but look, señor, it seems to be a permanent rise!"

"Aye," cried the captain, "an' it's risin' higher all the time, mates!"

This was true, but before the Eel had shot out through the surf, the truth dawned upon Frank.

He gave a startling cry.

"My soul," he cried, "I have it!"

"What's that, mate?"

"Why, we are fools! Don't you see? The isle is sinking!"

"Sinking!" exclaimed Carrero.

"Begorra, that's the way of it," cried Barney; "it's goin' to the bottom!"

"Golly! won't de water put out dem fires in great shape!" said Pomp, gazing up at the blazing mountain.

"The best thing we can do is to get to a safe distance at once," said Frank; "then we can enjoy the fireworks at our leisure."

"Right!" cried Carrero. "What a plunge it will be! It is, though, no uncommon thing for these South Sea islands to disappear in this manner."

"By no means," agreed Frank.

The submarine boat now shot like an arrow out to sea. It was soon far beyond danger.

Then it put about and lay to, for all were curious to see the end of the Weird Island.

But to the surprise of all, by nightfall the eruption became less, and the sea fell into a dead calm. The Eel even ventured up to the shore.

But fully one-third of the isle was under water.

"Perhaps no more will sink," ventured Carrero.

But Captain Cook took exceptions.

"Don't ye fret," he said; "this is only a lull. Ye'll see what ye'll see by ter-morrow."

The old captain's prediction was verified. By morning the worst eruption of all began.

During the night the great roaring column of flame shone against the western sky. But by daybreak the mountain was again in fearful throes.

It was a scene during that day which baffled description. By nightfall only the volcanic mountain itself was above water.

It vomited fire and steam furiously, but as Barney put it, "died hard." The next day, however, the end came.

The water entered the crater and there was a series of awful unearthly explosions. Tidal waves ran in all directions. These were only avoided by the submarine boat's going to the bottom.

When the explosions ceased and the sea grew quiet the end had come. The Weird Island had ceased to be.

The gold, which was so prominent an element in its composition must there remain until possibly at some future time another volcanic disturbance may upheave the isle again.

The submarine boat at once headed for the Chilian coast.

Santiago was reached in due time and here Jose Carrero took leave of his new made friends. He offered a large sum in payment, but Frank would not take it.

The Eel and her party visited the Archipelagoes and later returned home by the way of the Cape of Good Hope, having thus circumnavigated the globe.

Frank and Barney and Pomp returned to Readestown with the Eel. The captain returned to his own home well satisfied with this, his last cruise to the South Seas in quest of the Weird Island.

With which explanation the author will reluctantly take his leave.

[THE END.]

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